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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 000274

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2020

TAGS: PREL PGOV MNUC IR AF IN

SUBJECT: INDIA ON PRESSURING IRAN TO ENGAGE ON NUCLEAR  
PROGRAM

REF: SECSTATE 09124

Classified By: POLCOUNS Uzra Zeya for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (U) Due to the unavailability of senior Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials over the last ten days, PolOff delivered reftel demarche points on February 9 to Under Secretary Siddhartha Nath of MEA's Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran (PAI) Division.

¶2. (C) Nath promised to convey the points to PAI Joint Secretary Sinha (India equivalent of State Department Assistant Secretary) and other senior MEA officials. He acknowledged our concerns as valid and wondered whether Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki's February 5 statement at the annual Munich Security Conference that Iran was "approaching a final agreement" with Western interlocutors should be taken seriously. PolOff pointed out that Iran's counterproposal to have uranium enriched abroad in return for higher-grade uranium fails to address the concerns about its nuclear program, does not fulfill the objective of building confidence in Iran's nuclear intentions, and in effect rejects the IAEA's proposal. PolOff also reminded Nath that Iran had not followed through on the commitments it made in Geneva last October to reveal its intentions for its nuclear program.

¶3. (SBU) Nath recognized Iran's intransigence with respect to the issue of its nuclear program but also made clear that Indian policy toward Iran is not "one-dimensional" and explained that engaging Iran has its benefits. He pointed to security issues as a primary example and stressed the GOI's belief that Iran plays an important role in stabilizing Afghanistan. "Iran is on the right side of the divide" when it comes to Afghanistan, Nath explained, referring to Iran's efforts to contain extremist Wahabi ideology.

Indian Foreign Secretary Visits Tehran

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¶4. (SBU) Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao visited Tehran February 1-4 to attend the seventh round of Foreign Office Consultations/Strategic Dialogue, at the invitation of Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Fathollahi )- Rao's formal counterpart. Rao and Fathollahi exchanged views on Afghanistan and cross-border terrorism, and according to

Nath, also discussed Iran's concerns over new efforts to negotiate with "unrepentant and unreformed" Taliban in Afghanistan.

¶5. (C) Nath attempted to provide a good reason for why MEA had not announced Rao's trip until after she had departed India. He explained that with Iran, visits are not planned very well and are usually arranged at the last minute -- even for regular bilateral events which are scheduled in advance. According to a press release issued by the MEA on February 3, Rao -- who was accompanied by Sinha ) also called on Foreign Minister Mottaki, Minister for Economy and Finance Dr. Seyed Hosseini, and Supreme National Security Council Secretary Dr. Saeed Jalili. It was agreed that the next meeting of the India-Iran Joint Commission would be held in New Delhi at an "early date." We hope to meet with Sinha and possibly Rao in coming days to reinforce points and obtain a readout of the Tehran visit and will report results at that time.

ROEMER